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GNOSTICISM AND EGYPTIAN RELIGION

by

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I

Somewhat over a century ago a Frenchman decided to write a doctoral dissertation on Egyptian Gnosticism and was led by his research to maintain that the majority of the teachings of the gnostic Valentinus were "inspirées par le souffle religieux de l'ancienne Égypte."[1] M. E. Amélineau, well known for his work in Coptology and Egyptology, thus became perhaps the first person, in modern times, to argue for an ideological connection between Gnosticism and Egyptian Religion. Unfortunately his understanding of them was necessarily limited, and his work has had no lasting significance. But his thesis sprang from the sensible observation that a religious movement (Valentinianism) that had developed in Egypt would likely have been influenced by Egyptian religion.[2]

Several decades later Wilhelm Bousset, as he was writing his *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis*, glanced briefly at the possibility that Egyptian religion might have had a significant influence on the gnostic belief system. Important Coptic-gnostic texts had only recently become available, and so it was natural that the question should be

[1] *Essai sur le gnosticisme égyptien: ses développements et son origine égyptienne*: Annales du musée Guimet, Vol. 14 (Paris: Ministère de l'instruction publique, 1887), p. 10.

[2] "Valentin n'avait eu qu'à jeter les yeux sur les monuments qui l'entouraient en Égypte, qu'à prêter l'oreille aux légendes divines, et il avait ainsi trouvé la plus grande partie de sa théologie. Cela est si vrai qu'il n'y a pas jusqu'à son Plérôme qui ne se retrouve dans la religion égyptienne..." *Essai*, p. 293. Amélineau was influenced by the early 19th century German scholar Gieseler to think that Gnosticism developed in three main areas: Syria, where dualistic Gnosticism arose; Asia Minor, which was the birth-place of practical, rather than speculative Gnosticism; and Egypt, where pantheistic Gnosticism came into being (*Essai*, p. 5-6).

raised. Bousset's concern was to identify the influences that had affected the basic convictions of Gnosticism, and on that issue his conclusion regarding Egyptian religion was quite negative, although he left open the possibility of secondary influence: "Dass Ägypten ein Zentrum der gnostischen Bewegung gewesen ist, kann nicht geleugnet werden, man denke an die vielen neuentdeckten koptisch-gnostischen Schriften... . Aber andrerseits war Ägypten sicher nicht der Heimatboden der Gnosis, ägyptische Einflüsse sind in den wurzelhaften Grundanschauungen derselben nicht nachweisbar, wohl aber in sekundären Weiterbildungen."[3] That conclusion was perhaps not surprising, in view of the excitement at that time over discoveries in the Mesopotamian area, as well as the continuing limitations on knowledge of Egyptian religion.

The discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library provided indications of connections between Egypt and Gnosticism that could have reopened the question. The discovery was made in Egypt. The library contained a text called *The Gospels of the Egyptians*. It had references to Egyptian myths, such as that of the Phoenix.[4] It had three tractates in which the hightest deity was called, "The Hidden One," which could be a translation (into Greek and then into Coptic) of the name of the Egyptian deity, Amun.[5] In addition, the gnostic conception, found elsewhere but reiterated in the Nag Hammadi Library, of the journey of the soul after death, which in-

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[3] *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht: 1907), p. 5, n. 1. The newly discovered writings included the Berlin gnostic codex (Papyrus Berolinensis 8502), which Carl Schmidt was editing at that time. Bousset may also have had in mind the Askew and Bruce Codices, the former containing *Pistis Sophia*, and the latter including *The Books of Jeu*, which had recently been edited and published. Both codices, however, were discovered in the 18th century.

[4] *On the Origin of the World* (II,*5*), 121,35-123,1. The passage concludes with the following sentence, indicating a close connection with Egypt: "These great signs appeared only in Egypt, not in other lands, signifying that it is like the Paradise of god" (H.-G. Bethge/Orval S. Wintermute translation in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. by James M. Robinson [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977]), p. 176. For a full discussion of the Egyptian elements in this tractate, see Michel Tardieu, *Trois mythes gnostique: Adam, Éros et les animaux d'Égypte dans un écrit de Nag Hammadi (II,5)*. (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1974), chapter 5.

[5] *The Three Steles of Seth* (VII,*5*), 122,14; 123,1; 126,5. *Zostrianos* (VIII,*1*) 13,3; 15,12; 18,10; passim. *Allogenes* (XI,*3*) 45,31; 46,31; 48,16; 51,17; 58,19. The Coptic contains the Greek καλύπτος. Other sources are possible, including the deity of the Bible (Deut. 31:17,18; Ps. 10:11; 13:1; passim). However the term "The Hidden One" is not used of the Biblical deity.

volved knowing certain key words or phrases for the journey's successful completion, had its closest parallel in Egyptian Religion.[6]

These indications did not, however, reopen the question of an Egyptian connection in any significant way. Jean Doresse was the first to comment on the matter after the discovery of the library. Following a brief examination of several parallels, he concluded that "in all this there is no proof of Egyptian influence upon the basic conceptions of Gnostic mythology."[7] In writing this, he seemed simply to be restating the position of Bousset, whose words he could have repeated virtually without modification. This same position was reaffirmed by C. J. Bleeker, the Egyptologist, writing a decade later than Doresse for the international colloquium on the origins of Gnosticism, at Messina.[8] He also examined some parallels between Gnosticism and Egyptian religion, but none were distinctive enough to make the relationship more than possible.

Only two other articles dealing significantly with Gnosticism and Egyptian religion have been published.[9] At the same Messina collo-

[6] In the Nag Hammadi Library, see *The Apocalypse of Paul* (V,*2*), and *The (First) Apocalypse of James* (V,*3*). In the latter, see particularly 33,2-34,25. For a discussion, see L. Kákosy, "Gnosis und ägyptische Religion," in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, ed. by Ugo Bianchi (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), pp. 240-44. The library also contained a portion of the Hermetic tractate Asclepius (VI,*8*) that has a significant number of Egyptian parallels in the section often called the Egyptian apocalypse (70,3,-74,6); see Martin Krause, "Ägyptisches Gendankengut in der Apokalypse des Asclepius," *ZDMG*, Supplementa I (1969), pp. 48-57.

[7] *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics: An Introduction to the Gnostic Coptic Manuscripts Discovered at Chenoboskion* (trans. by Philip Mairet) (New York: The Viking Press: 1960 [orig. French ed., 1958]), pp. 272-75. His erroneous statement that "our writings do not ... even mention the name of Egypt except as the symbol of accursed matter" (p. 272) (see note 4 above), may well have had a negative influence on subsequent scholars, many of whom were not in a position until some years after he wrote to judge for themselves.

[8] "The Egyptian Background of Gnosticism," in *Le Origini*, p. 231. Bleeker quotes Bousset explicitly. Bleeker, however, echoing Amélineau, thinks that it is "a priori plausible that thinkers like Basilides and Valentinus borrowed certain ideas from the old religion of the country where they taught their wisdom" (p. 231).

[9] The articles were identified from *Nag Hammadi Bibliography 1948-69*, ed. by David M. Scholer (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971) and the supplements to that volume appearing annually in *Novum Testamentum*. Another article should perhaps be noted: Gertrud Thausing, "Altägyptische Gedanken in der Gnosis," in *Kairos* N.F. 15 (1973), pp. 116-22. She defines Gnosticism as a mystical "way" and as "deep knowledge," and therefore is not discussing the topic of this article. There is also a very brief paper by Pahor Labib, "Egyptian Survivals in the Nag Hammadi Library," published in *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis: Papers read at the First International Congress of Coptology* (Cairo, December 1976), ed. by R. McL. Wilson (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), pp. 149-51.

quium, L. Kákosy presented a contribution with the suggestive title, "Gnosis und ägyptische Religion." He too considered various parallels, including the motif of the journey of the soul after death (noted above), but offered no definitive conclusions.[10] And in 1980, a preliminary paper was prepared by François Daumas for a colloquium on Gnosticism and the Hellenistic world, entitled "Gnosticism and Egyptian Religious Thought." In it he noted that the topic "has been little studied," considered the difficulties of undertaking such a discussion, and presented some conceptions from Egyptian religion, which he thought might prove fruitful when compared with Gnosticism; he did not, however, attempt to make the comparisons.[11]

Two things are noteable from this review of research; first, there is so little of it, as was noted by Daumas; and secondly, where there has been an effort to discover and examine parallels, the inconclusive nature of the results. It seems likely that the two are related. No one appears to doubt that it is inherently plausible that Gnosticism borrowed from Egyptian religion. But it seems not to be clear what significant conclusions can be drawn, once parallels have been established. What seems to be lacking is an historical connection that relates some aspect of the root of Gnosticism to Egyptian religion, in the light of which comparative studies would take on siginificance.[12] It is, of course, precisely this that Bousset, Doresse and Bleeker have denied is possible. The reason, at least for Bousset, is not hard to find, and it is restated by Bleeker; namely, the conviction that Gnosticism, which flowered so much, and for so long, in Egypt, in fact originated elsewhere, specifically,

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[10] *Le Origini*, pp. 238-47.

[11] *Gnosticisme et monde hellénistique: les objectifs du colloque de Louvain-la-Neuve (11-14 Mars 1980).* Travaux préparatoires présentés par Julien Ries et Jean-Marie Sevrin (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, n.d.) pp. 21-29. Unfortunately Daumas did not give a paper on the topic at the colloquium. His completed paper was entitled, "Le fonds égyptien de l'hermétisme" (*Gnosticisme et monde hellénistique: Actes du colloque de Louvain-la-Neuve [11-14 Mars 1980]*, publiés sous la direction de Julien Ries [Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, 1982], pp. 3-25).

[12] It was perhaps this that Daumas was thinking of when he wrote: "This (attempting a comparison) would have no interest unless we are able to establish that historical relations could have existed between the two series, either in particular cases or in general. This question of historical intermediaries is capital. Without this, nothing may be seriously proposed." *Gnosticisme et monde hellénistique: Les objectifs*, p. 24.

in Iran.[13] But the Nag Hammadi library has raised serious question about that belief: one looks in vain for the ultimate dualism characteristic of Iranian religion,[14] and one finds a strong element of speculative Judaism that points in another direction.[15] At present there seems to be a reluctance to identify any one place as the place of origin.[16] It is therefore now more conceivable than it once was that Egyptian religion could have influenced Gnosticism at its root.

It should be added that we are now in a much better position than were Bleeker and Kákosy to examine that question from the point of view of our knowledge of Egyptian religion. Within the last two decades fresh translations of long known texts have become available (based on much improved knowledge of the Egyptian language), translations of less well-known texts have been published, and a thoroughgoing reexamination of our understanding of Egyptian religion has been carried out.[17]

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[13] Bleeker adds Syria as a possibility (*Le Origini*, p. 230). In the same paragraph, however, he states that the problem of the country of origin of Gnosticism is insoluble.

[14] See "Zoroastrianism and Parsiism" (J. Duchesne-Guillemin) in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia* (1981), Vol. 19, particularly p. 1173, col. 2.

[15] See Birger A. Pearson, "Jewish Elements in Gnosticism and the Development of Gnostic Self-Definition" in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, Vol. I: *The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries*, ed. by E. P. Sanders (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), pp. 151-60.

[16] The current status is perhaps best summarized by Hans-Martin Schenke in his "The Problem of Gnosis," in *The Second Century* 3 (1983), pp. 79-81. One must have some reservations, however, about his conclusion that "it is better to reckon with a multiple origin." See also the more extensive review of the question of origins by Kurt Rudolph in his *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (trans. by R. McL. Wilson) (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) (from the 1980 German ed. [2nd, revised and expanded]), pp. 275-87. He suggests that Gnosticism originated on the fringes of Judaism, but does not specify a country of origin.

[17] E.g., in the first category, the following translations of the Book of the Dead: *The Book of the Dead or Going Forth by Day*, translated by Thomas George Allen (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974); *Le livre des morts des anciens Égyptiens*, translated by Paul Barguet (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1967); and *Das Totenbuch der Ägypter*, edited and translated by Erik Hornung (Zürich and München: Artemis, 1979). In the second category are such works as *Sonnenhymnen in thebanischen Gräbern*, edited by Jan Assmann (Mainz: Philipp v. Zabern, 1982), *Die ägyptische Unterweltbücher* (Books of the Underworld and the Gates), edited and translated by Erik Hornung (Zürich and München: Artemis, 1972), *The Ancient Egyptian Book of Two Ways*, edited and translated by Leonard Lesko (Berkeley: University of California, 1972), and translations of hymns and prayers, such as *Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete*, edited and translated by Jan Assmann (Zürich and München: Artemis, 1975) and *Hymnes et prières de l'Égypte ancienne*, edited and translated by André Barucq and François Daumas (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1980). In the third category, major works are: *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt*:

II

The Nag Hammadi library contains one text that may provide an opportunity to reopen the question of the relationship of Gnosticism and Egyptian religion, namely, the tractate *Eugnostos.* Because of its provenance, date, structural parallels, and ambiguous status as a gnostic tractate, it seems to be a bridge document of sorts in which one can see the movement from one to the other.

Two copies of *Eugnostos* are found in the Nag Hammadi library, one in Codex III, the other in Codex V. Although some have attempted to identify Christian elements in it, no such elements have been found that could not as reasonably have come from other sources, with the possible exception of some minor editorial touches.[18] It does, however, exist in a Christian format: it has been incorporated, with a few deletions, into the tractate *The Sophia of Jesus Christ.*[19]

Eugnostos is probably to be dated some time in the first century A.D. That is so because, in addition to the lack of Christian elements, it also shows no sign of being influenced by the highly

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The One and the Many, by Eric Hornung (trans. by John Baines from the 1971 German edition; Ithaca: Cornell University, 1982), and *Re und Amun: Die Krise des polytheistischen Weltbilds im Ägypten der 18.-20 Dynastie*, by Jan Assmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983).

[18] R. McL. Wilson has collected the various references and allusions in his *Gnosis and the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), pp. 115-16. See also my discussion, in the introduction to *Nag Hammadi Codices III,3-4 and V,1 with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502,3 and Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1081: Eugnostos and the Sophia of Jesus Christ* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, forthcoming). Michel Tardieu's recent translation and commentary of p. Berolinensis 8502 (*Codex de Berlin* [Les éditions du Cerf: Paris, 1984]), which includes *Eugnostos*, seems unaware of Wilson's cautious evaluation. Tardieu sees *Eugnostos* as dependent on the New Testament, and finds support for this in the description of angels as members of the courts of the major deities, which, he maintains, is derived from Ephesians (p. 66). Since angels are not mentioned in Ephesians, it is not clear what he means (perhaps Hebrews?). In any case, a heavenly court made up of angels is certainly implied in the Old Testament, in Psalms 148:1-2, and is explicitly referred to in the intertestamental Jubilees (the creation of angels of the presence) (2:2); see also Hymn II in I QH (Dead Sea Scrolls).

[19] *The Sophia of Jesus Christ* is in Nag Hammadi Codex III, and another copy is found in Papyrus Berolinensis 8502 (BG). The teachings of *Eugnostos* have been put on the lips of Christ. The priority of *Eugnostos* in relation to *The Sophia of Jesus Christ* was established, by Martin Krause ("Das literarische Verhältnis des Eugnostosbriefes zur Sophia Jesu Christi" in *Mullus, Festschrift Theodor Klauser; Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, Ergänzungsband I, pp. 215-23).

developed gnostic theological systems of the mid-third of the second century, such as Valentinianism, nor are there signs of the Middle Platonism of the second century A.D.[20] Its provenance is in all likelihood Egypt.[21]

Questions have been raised about its Gnosticism, and for good reason, as we will see later. However there is little question that in its present form it is gnostic. The two indications of this are the presence of a distinctively Sethian series of divine beings, to be discussed below, and the phrase "And in this way was revealed the defect of femaleness" (III 85,8-9 and par.).

Analysis has already shown that the tractate is a composite of two speculative documents.[22] The first, which we shall call Part A, covers the initial three quarters of the tractate (III 70,1-85,9 and par.) and contains the evidence of Egyptian influence.

Part A is a description of the development of the supercelestial realm and of its connections with the structures of the visible cosmos, particularly those having to do with time. The primary intention of the writer/final editor was to show that the structure of the visible cosmos was determined by invisible, supercelestial realities, rather than by forces within its own sphere. Related to that also was the desire to show that the supercelestial realm was developed from primal mind, and that the deities in it in reality constitute different aspects of that mind.

The description of the supercelestial realm begins with "He Who Is," the one whose existence precedes all others (III 71,13-73,16 and par.). Primarily he is described in negative terms: he is unbegotten, he has no name, he is unknowable, he is ineffable, etc.

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[20] See my discussion in the introduction to *Nag Hammadi Codices III,3-4 and V,1*. In contrast to others who have studied *Eugnostos*, Tardieu dates it late in the second century (about 175), because of a similar triad found in *Eugnostos* and, he says, in the Letter to Theophrastus by Monoimus the Arabian (*Codex de Berlin*, p. 66). The letter contains no such reference: one assumes Tardieu was referring to the other sections of Hippolytus's discussion of Monoimus (*Ref.* 8.12.1-14.9). But in any case, his identification of the triad Father-Man-Son of Man in *Eugnostos* does not adequately take into consideration all the evidence of the text.

[21] This is based on the reference to the year having 360 days (NHC III 84,4-5 and par.), which was a distinctively Egyptian conception. See my discussion in the introduction to *Nag Hammadi Codices III,3-4 and V,1*. Tardieu specifies Alexandria as the probable place of composition (*Codex de Berlin*, p. 66).

[22] See my introduction to *Nag Hammadi Codices III,3-4 and V,1*. Tardieu also recognizes that a major change occurs at III 85,9 and par. He considers the section from there through 88,17 as an interpolation (*Codex de Berlin*, pp. 383-89).

Positive characteristics only appear when it is said that he embraces everything, and that he *is* certain rational characteristics, beginning with mind.

The first step in the development of the transcendent world occurs when this being reflects upon himself and produces a being like himself, who is appropriately called Self-Begetter, "He who Fathered Himself," and the like (III 75,3-12 and par.).[23] He has two functions: to create those who resemble him, who constitute "The Generation over Whom There is no Kingdom among the Kingdoms that Exist" (III 75,17-76,10 and par.), and bring into existence the next being, who is called Immortal Man, but also "Begotten" or "Begetter," "Perfect Mind." He is an androgynous being, who, therefore, has a female name also, "All-wise Begettress Sophia." Immortal Man creates "gods and archangels and angels..." (III 77,20-21 and par.). He also brings into being, through a spiritual sexual interaction with his consort, another androgynous divinity, who is called "First Begotten/Begetter, Son of God" (V 9,1-4 [page missing in III]). His consort is called "First-begotten/Begettress Sophia". This being creates a realm of angels. He is also named "Adam of the Light" (III 81, 12). First Begetter and his consort then interact and produce a third androgynous being: "Savior, Begetter of all things" (III 81,21-82,6). This last being, with his consort, Sophia, All-Begettress, brings into existence six androgynous spiritual beings, who, with their consorts, make twelve. They are said to be the reflection (type) of the first group (and their names show that), even though here there are six, whereas earlier there were only five. These twelve generate sevety-two powers (III 83,13-15). They in turn reveal three hundred and sixty powers (III 83,15-19).

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[23] Roelof van den Broek, in "Jewish and Platonic Speculations in Early Alexandrian Theology: Eugnostus, Philo, Valentinus, and Origen," in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. by Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986 [p. 191], contends that the writer of *Eugnostos* actually presents two differing views of the initial movement in the divine leading to multiplicity. In the first, it begins when Unbegotten sees his own image as in a mirror (III 75,3-9 and par.). In the second, "the First who appeared before the universe" brings forth the first androgynous man by his thought (III 76,14-24 and par.). Van den Broek offers no explanation for a writer including two different and incompatible accounts of such a crucial event. But in fact the writer has not done so. "The First who appeared" does not describe the highest being, one of whose principal characteristics is precisely that he does not appear. The one who *appeared* was the reflection in the mirror, namely, Self-Begetter.

The climax of Part A is the assertion that basic structures of order in the visible world (particularly time) came to be as reflections (types) of the beings in the transcendent realm: "Therefore, our aeon came to be as the type of Immortal Man. Time came to be as the type of First Begotten, his son. [The year] came to be as the type of [Savior. The] twelve months came to be as the type of the twelve powers. The three hundred sixty days of the year[24] came to be as the type of the three hundred sixty powers who appeared from Savior. Their hours and moments came to be as the type of the angels who came from them (the three hundred sixty powers) (and) who are without number" (III 83,20-84,11).

The influences on Part A that have already been identified are Platonic/Neopythagorean, Jewish, and Sethian. The Platonic/Neopythagorean element is found in the sophisticated typological conception, and the assertion that the supercelestial realm is made up of beings and structures that appear in various numerical sequences.[25] The Jewish element probably springs from Jewish wisdom circles in the Diaspora and can be seen in the references to angels,[26] and the use of the term Sophia as one of the designations for the female consorts in the supercelestial realm.[27] The Sethian influence, which is almost certainly Jewish too,[28] is to be seen in the three divine men: Immortal Man, Son of Man, and Son of Son of Man. Since the second is identified as Adam, the third, who is also designated Savior, can be none other than Seth.[29]

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[24] See note 20, above.

[25] See Plato, *Timaeus* 28-29, and John Dillon's discussion of the Neopythagoreans in his *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London: Duckworth, 1977), particularly pp. 342-44. This influence may extend to the way in which the initial five deities are divided in the present text of *Eugnostos*. The emphasis is on the initial three, the two consortless deities and the initial one with a consort, thus suggesting the pattern, found in Eudorus of Alexandria, of a higher monad, followed by a lower one and an indefinite dyad (for further discussion, see my introduction to *Nag Hammadi Codices III,3-4 and V,1*; it should be noted that when that was written, the connection with Egyptian religion was not yet apparent).

[26] The concept of angels who form a heavenly retinue seems distinctively Jewish during the period and in the area under consideration. However, Jewish angelology was probably influenced in a major way by Iranian beliefs (see "Angel" [Theodore Gaster] in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. A-D).

[27] See George W. MacRae, S. J., "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth," *Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970), pp. 86-87.

[28] See Pearson, "Jewish Elements in Gnosticism" in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, pp. 153-54.

[29] See my discussion in the introduction to *Nag Hammadi Codices III,3-4 and V,1*.

It seems likely, also, that in this context the earthly reference point for "The Generation Over Whom there is no Kingdom..." was the Sethians.[30]

Once those influences have been identified, however, there remain several significant questions. Why are the initial being and his visible reflection without consorts, when all the other deities have them? Why is it necessary to have a second being (the visible reflection) in order for the creation of the subsequent beings to commence? Why is the role of the deities in the next group, below the initial two, limited to bringing other deities into being? Why have them in the system at all? In essence the question is, Why should the system be as complex as it is?

These considerations have led to an exploration of the possible connections with Egyptian religion.

III

The clearest point of connection with Egyptian Religion can be seen in the similarity between a major Egyptian conception of the deities of the *Urzeit* and the pattern of *Urzeit* deities that literary analysis shows to have been behind the present text of *Eugnostos*. The analysis of *Eugnostos* has been done elsewhere[31] but it will be useful to summarize it here.

As noted above, when Part A was discussed, there is an anomaly in the description of the second group of deities that come into existence, namely, the six, who become twelve when their consorts are counted. Before their names are given in the text, it is said that they are the type of those who preceded them. That means that they should be similar. However, those who precede them are five in number, not six. The names of the first five of the six reflect the names of the initial five. The difference, then is with the sixth being. Was the sixth being added at some point by an editor to the second list, or was a sixth being substracted from the first one? The latter seems to be the case, in view of the way the number six fits

[30] The term also occurs in two other Sethian tractates: *Apocalypse of Adam* (NHC V,*5*) 82,20-21; and *Hypostasis of the Archons* (II,*4*) 97,3-5. In addition, it is also found in *On the Origin of the World* (II,*5*), 127,13-14. For an examination of other gnostic, as well as non-gnostic parallels see Francis T. Fallon, "The Gnostics: The Undominated Race," *Novum Testamentum* 21 (1979), pp. 271-88. Tardieu, also, has a brief discussion of the phrase (*Trois mythes gnostiques*, p. 81 [note 236]).

[31] See my introduction to *Nag Hammadi Codices III,3-4 and V,1.*

in with the subsequent scheme, which is built on multiples of twelve (the six and their consorts).[32]

The clue to what happened is in the names that are not common between the two lists. For the third, fourth and fifth beings, the first list has the names Immortal Man, Son of Man/Adam, and Son of Son of Man/Savior. The second list omits them. These are the names that indicate Sethian influence, as we noted above. One can suppose that they were added by a Sethian editor, in order to put beings who were important in the early Sethian salvation history into the supercelestial realm.[33] The sixth being probably was dropped in that editing process. Perhaps the reason was that there was no Sethian equivalent with which it could be identified. Or perhaps there was, but it was such that it was impossible for the Sethian editor to admit that being into the highest realm. One notes that his name, assuming that the pattern of the second list was followed, would have been Arch-Begetter, and that *he* is identified with the ignorant and malevolent Yaldabaoth in *The Sophia of Jesus Christ* (BG 119,14-16 [a page is missing in NHC III]).

Thus, it appears that the initial number of *Urzeit* divinities in the original version of Part A would have been six, with the six divided into the first two, who were without consorts, and the rest, four in number, who had them, and who therefore would have constituted a total of eight. Hence, the two and the eight.

This *Urzeit* pattern is not found anywhere outside Egyptian religion during the period of the rise and development of Gnosticism. Its polytheism eliminates Judaism, even though Jewish monotheism had been modified, if not compromised, during this period, by a sharper focus on intermediate beings in apocalyptic speculations,[34] and an emphasis on hypostatized aspects of the divine nature within the wisdom movement.[35] It does not resemble

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[32] Thus the 12 bring forth 72 powers, who in turn are responsible for 360 powers (III 83,10-19 and par.). Subsequently a corresponding number of aeons, heavens and firmaments are provided (III 84,12-85,6 and par.).

[33] For a discussion of the ancient tradition of syncretism in Egypt, of which this would be an example, see Françoise Dunand, "Les syncrétismes dans la religion de l'Égypte romaine" in *Les syncrétismes dans les religions de l'antiquité: colloque de Besançon (22-23 octobre 1973)*, ed. by Françoise Dunand and Pierre Lévêque (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), p. 152ff.

[34] See D. S. Russell, *The Method & Message of Jewish Apocalyptic: 200 BC-AD 100* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), chapter 9.

[35] See Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, Vol. I (trans. by John Bowden) (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974 [from the 1973 German ed. {2nd, revised and enlarged}]), pp. 153-62.

any developments we know of within Platonic philosophy. The Platonic conception of the first principles was of a monad and an indefinite dyad, with creation, i.e., differentiation, occurring when the monad interacted with the dyad.[36] This was modified somewhat by Eudorus of Alexandria (floruit 25 B.C.) by the addition of another monad, a supreme principle, above the opposites of the monad and the indefinite dyad.[37] The resulting scheme would have resembled more closely the pattern of the first three beings in *Eugnostos* Part A, but not the rest.

We have already noted that the ultimate dualism of Iranian religion is not reflected in the Nag Hammadi collection. The Babylonian planetary pattern, upon which ancient astrology was based, would seem not to have been an influence, since there the important number was seven.[38] Likewise, Syria, where there seems to have been little religious systematizing and the best known deity was the mother goddess Atargatis, has nothing to offer.[39] No more do the religions of Greece and Rome, whose highly personalized gods were of a very different character from those described in *Eugnostos*.

The Egyptian conception, to which we now turn, was the result of the coming together of several streams of religious thought in Thebes during the New Kingdom (17th through the 20th dynasties: 1551-1070 B.C.). Aspects of it are described in texts from the Ptolemaic period (323-30 B.C.) and later, and therefore appear to have been current during the time of the rise of Gnosticism.[40] The principal god of Thebes had for centuries been Amun, "The Hidden One," a deity of the wind and breath, and therefore in some sense of life itself. Texts from the early period indicate that he was thought of as one god among many. It has recently become clear, as a result of the researches of Jan Assmann,[41] that a major theological change occurred in the Ramesside period, perhaps in

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[36] Aristotle, *Met.* I 6.987a.29ff.

[37] Simplicius, *In Phys.* 181.10ff. Diels.

[38] W. W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilisation*, 3rd ed., revised (Cleveland and New York: World, 1961 [originally published, 1952]), pp. 345-49.

[39] Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilisation*, pp. 341-45.

[40] See Kurt Sethe, *Amun und die acht Urgötter von Hermopolis: eine Untersuchung über Ursprung und Wesen des ägyptischen Götterkönigs* (Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1929), p. 7 (the *Vorbemerkung*).

[41] See note 17, above, under the third category. Assmann's work was based in large part on newly available texts (*Re und Amun*, p. xi).

response to the "heretical" solar disk theology of Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV), but perhaps also as a reflection of the pervasiveness of imperial power under pharaohs like Ramesses II and Ramesses III.[42] Amun, who had become the national god with the establishment of the New Kingdom, and began to be identified with the sun god Re at least by the reign of Queen Hatshepsut,[43] came to be thought of as the essence of divinity. As a result, all other gods were thought of as informed by his presence and, in some sense, expressions or crystalizations of him, even though retaining their distinctive forms.[44]

The coming into being of the other gods did not, however, occur all at once, by the direct activity of Amun. It was the result of a specific sequence of creative events, as described in the texts mentioned above. Initially Amun is said to have brought himself into being, which may mean no more than that he always existed, since it assumes that he pre-existed himself.[45] Then he created another divinity to be responsible for bringing into being eight primal gods who were sexually paired (hence four pairs). These gods had been adopted into the Theban theology from that of Hermopolis, the city where they had been important from the time of the Old Kingdom.[46] Their function was to journey down the Nile and create the major divinities at the important cult centers: the sun god Re, at Hermopolis, the earth god Ptah, in Memphis, and the creator god Atum, in Heliopolis. With this function completed, they returned to Thebes, according to the myth, died, and were buried in the temple in Medinet Habu.[47]

Thus, as in the original of Part A of *Eugnostos*, Egyptian religion had a conception of an initial consortless being, who brought into existence from himself another consortless being, whose function,

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[42] See B. G. Trigger, et al., *Ancient Egypt: A Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 211.

[43] See Assmann, *Amun und Re*, pp. 182-83.

[44] See Assmann, *Amun und Re*, pp. 189-203.

[45] See Hellmut Brunner, *Grundzüge der altägyptischen Religion* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), p. 52.

[46] See Sethe, *Amun und die acht Urgötter*, secs 63-92. The use of the Egyptian word for eight as the name of Hermopolis has been traced to the Old Kingdom (see "Die Achtheit" [Altenmüller] in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*).

[47] This function of the Eight in the creative process was not their original one. Initially, in Hermopolis, they were gods of chaos, who had to be vanquished by the sun god for the creative process to begin. Their names reflect the earlier role (see discussion below).

in turn, was to create a group of eight divinities, who were sexually paired with each other and whose sole function was to create other divinities more directly involved in the world-creating process.

There are other parallels that draw the two accounts even closer:

a. The names and epithets of the first consortless deity (the highest being) have interesting and suggestive parallels. In both cases this being is designated by terms indicating his hiddenness and indescribability. For example, *Eugnostos* speaks of him as "ineffable," and says that "no principle (or beginning) knew him, no authority, no subjection, nor any creature" (III 71,15-16 and par.). A hymn to Amun contains the same concept: "Kein Gott kennt seine wahre Gestalt, sein Bild wird nicht entfaltet in den Schriften, man lehrt nich über ihn etwas Sicheres."[48] Also, related to his unknowability is his essential namelessness, or, what is perhaps the same thing, the inability to know his true name: *Eugnostos*: "He has no name; for whoever has a name is the creation of another. He is unnameable" (III 71,20-72,3); Egypt: "Il n'y avait pas de mère qui lui ait fait son nom"[49]; "Ich bin einer... dessen Name unbekannt ist."[50] Furthermore, his unknowability is such that there are not even any signs of him: *Eugnostos*: "He is untraceable" (III 72,19 and par.); Egypt: "I am one who strides not."[51] On the positive side, however, he is the one who encompasses everything, while, in keeping with what has been said above, he is encompassed by none: *Eugnostos*: "He embraces the totalities of the totalities, and nothing embraces him" (III 73,6-7); Egypt: "Du hast den Horizont ergriffen..."[52]; "Il n'y a rien en dehors de lui"[53]; "There is none who grasps me, or shall grasp me."[54]

b. In both *Eugnostos* and Egyptian religion, the second consortless deity, the direct initiator of the creative process, is a crystallization of the highest being. In the former, Unbegotten, the

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[48] P. Leiden I 350 IV,18 (Jan Assmann, *Re und Amun*, p. 201).

[49] P. Leiden I 350 IV,10 (Barucq/Daumas, *Hymnes et prières*, p. 223.)

[50] Book of the Dead, spell 42,41 (Hornung, *Das Totenbuch der Ägypter*, p. 115). The name Amun does not appear in spell 42 (although the names of many other gods do), and it may be that Re is referred to (spell 42,30). The concept is found in a hymn to Amun (p. Leiden I 350 IV—see Assmann, *Re und Amun*, pp. 201 [for the translation] and 203 [for the explanation]).

[51] Book of the Dead, spell 42 (Allen translation).

[52] Amduat 12.196 (Hornung, *Die ägyptische Unterweltbücher*).

[53] Eulogy of Amun in the Decree (of divinization) for Nesikhonsou, 6 (Barucq/Daumas, *Hymnes et prières*, p. 257).

[54] Book of the Dead 42 (Allen translation).

highest being, reflects upon himself and his image comes to appearance; this being, then, is appropriately called "Self-Father" and "Self-Begetter," as mentioned above (see III 75,3-9 and par.). In Egyptian religion, there is no one conception about who this being is. Probably the earliest account is that in which Amun is identified as the primal snake Kematef.[55] Kematef's son, then, who is also a snake (and hence is his father's image) is the direct creator of the Eight. Later this concept is modified, and the god Ptah is said to be the immediate creator of the Eight.[56] Since Ptah is identified as Amun, Amun is to be understood as acting in and through him.[57]

c. The four males among the Eight in the original Part A of *Eugnostos*, and in Egyptian religion, are given names that indicate their role. In the former case, the names have to do with their current function, namely that of begetting: they are responsible for begetting other divine beings. In the latter, the names have to do, not with the current role, but with their being gods of chaos; thus: Nun, the primal waters; Heh, endless space, Keku, darkness, and Tenemu, the disappearing or the lost.[58] In neither case do the names suggest personality beyond what the names signify. Related to this is the fact that no stories are told about any of these deities individually.

d. As was mentioned above, the supercelestial realm in *Eugnostos* is thought to be made up of various aspects of primal mind. This is clear from one part of the description of Unbegotten: "For he is all mind, thought and reflecting, considering, rationality and power. They all are equal powers. They are the sources of the totalities (including at least the supercelestial realm[59]). And their

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[55] Sethe, *Amun und die acht Urgötter*, sec. 38.

[56] Sethe, *Amun und die acht Urgötter*, sec. 99 and 109.

[57] See Sethe, *Amun und die acht Urgötter*, sec. 113. It should be noted that the identification is with the local manifestation of Amun in Thebes. But see also p. Leiden I 305 4.21-22 ("Trois sont tous les dieux, Amon, Rè, Ptah qui n'ont pas de semblable. Son nom est caché, en tant qu'Amon; il est Rè par le visage; son corps c'est Ptah."—Barucq/Daumas, *Hymnes et prières*, p. 224). The same hymn also identifies Amun with the Eight: "Une autre de ses formes est l'Ogdoade" (Barucq/Daumas, p. 223). See also note 44.

[58] "Achtheit," *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*. Amun, the hidden one, was normally in the fourth position in later times. Sometimes too Niau, emptyness or Gereh, lack, is found.

[59] Note that one of the epithets attached to Immortal Man (the third being in the pattern) is Perfect Mind (III 77,2; cf. V 6,6-7), and he is also described as having the same mental characteristics as the highest being (III 78,5-9).

whole race <from first> to last is in the foreknowledge of Unbegotten" (III 73,8-16). This is very close to the Theban concept, already discussed, that every other divinity is in some sense an aspect of Amun. *Eugnostos* goes beyond that, however. In a section that is found only in Codex V, because a page of papyrus has been lost in Codex III, cosmic number patterns (perhaps Platonic in origin[60]) are identified with these mental attributes (V 7,24-29). Moreover that is followed immediately by a section in which everything, including "begotten things," is described as being generated from primal mind (V 8,1-18). *Eugnostos*, then, while reflecting the Theban theology of the Ramesside period, also seems to represent a considerable development beyond it. We will discuss this in the next section when we examine the reasons for the differences between *Eugnostos*, Part A, and Egyptian religion.

In summary, we have seen the similar *Urzeit* pattern between the original of Part A in *Eugnostos* and Egyptian religious texts reflecting the Theban theology of the Ramesside period and later. We have noted that this pattern is found nowhere outside Egypt in the area and during the time of the rise and developement of Gnosticism. We have also observed close parallels between the two in relation to the concept of the highest deity, the relationship of the second deity to the first, and the naming of the subsequent four male deities. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Egyptian religion played a major role in developing the structure of the supercelestial realm in *Eugnostos*, Part A.

III

What occurred in Egyptian religion that would have made it possible for the pattern as we find it in original Part A of *Eugnostos* to have been developed as it did? Our knowledge of developments during the millennium and more that separates the Theban theologians from the writer of the original Part A of Eugnostos is quite limited. Much of what has been preserved in inscriptions and papyri, even when it comes from times later than the Ramesside period, still seems to be reflective of earlier times. And a vast amount has been lost. Daumas writes: "The titles of works transmitted by the Egyptian tradition itself show that we have lost

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[60] See Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, pp. 4-5.

nearly all of the fundamental books through which we might have informed ourselves, especially the books of teachings. We have no reason to doubt the information provided by Clement of Alexandria about the works which served for the education of different categories of priests. ... We are constrained to search for our documentation in the allusions which abound in the debris of ancient Egyptian literature."[61]

The differences between *Eugnostos*, Part A, and Egyptian religion as we have been describing it, give us some conception of what happened during that period. We have already noted one development, namely the use of the analogy of the mind to understand the relationship of the highest being to other deities and to all other things.[62] The *Eugnostos* texts we noted above showed that mind was not only conceived in its more general aspect, but was also analyzed into its various functions, which were then given a certain measure of independent standing, so they could be identified with, for example, the supercelestial numbers (V 7,26-29). The texts also indicated that these hypostasized functions were arranged hierarchically.[63]

The influence of the analogy of mind, along with the analysis into various functions, may also be seen in the way in which each new major deity in *Eugnostos* is produced, after the third. In each case the responsible male deity "agrees" with his corresponding female deity. Since the female deities are always called Sophia, this means that each significant step in supercelestial creation takes place in consultation with one of the functions of mind.

Another development is the transformation of a theology rooted in Egyptian historical myth into one of universal, transcendent realities. The names of the deities, which marked them as Egyptian, are gone, replaced by those of a more universal character.

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[61] "Gnosticism and Egyptian Religious Thought," p. 22. The reference in Clement is to *Stromata* 6.4.

[62] This analogy was important in Greek philosophy from the time of Anaxagoras (500 to 428 B.C.) (see νοῦς B [Behm], *TDNT*, Vol. 4), and it may be that that was the source of it. The possibility of an Egyptian source cannot be discounted, however. A hymn to Amun-Re from Hibis contains the following lines, "*Bai* qui a engendré les taureaux pour féconder les vaches, il a pensé leurs (les vaches) formes en vue de la procréation" (sec. 16; Barucq/Daumas, *Hymnes et prières*, p. 323).

[63] For a discussion of the list, and its influence on Manicheism, see Tardieu, *Codex de Berlin*, pp. 366-69.

There is no reference to the snake Kematef or his son. No reference to Thebes, the Nile journey, the cities visited on the way, or the return to Thebes and burial at Medinet Habu. It is as though the realm of history itself—that is, the realm of particular events, times and places—has lost its interest, and attention has turned to events beyond time.[64]

The influence of the realm beyond time can also be seen in the change in what happens to the Eight. In Egyptian religion, as we noted, they return to Thebes and die. But in original Part A, they continue in the supercelestial realm, even though they have finished their work. The reason appears to be that they are part of the timeless realm, i.e., they are immortal.

Another development, which has already been noted briefly, is the adoption of a sophisticated typological system that goes considerably beyond such simple notions as that some sacred space and/or structure is modeled after an ideal archetype, which is found often in unsophisticated cultures.[65] This adoption may have caused the modification of the number of deities that the Eight are said to create. Whereas in Egyptian religion there are three, in Part A of *Eugnostos* six powers come forth, who are types of the initial six (in original Part A). This typological system also makes it possible to relate the supercelestial realm to the temporal structures of the visible cosmos, as we have noted.

Further research needs to be done concerning the circumstances under which these and other changes occurred.[66] They may be related to the challenge of philosophical-religious movements, such as early Stoicism, which did not look beyond the visible cosmos for the source of cosmic governance.[67] Likewise the circumstances under which the early Sethians adopted the orignal of Part A, and identified the major figures of their sacred history with those in its

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[64] This was different from the traditional Egyptian preoccupation with the after-life. The after-life was not history-less (Brunner, *Grundzüge*, p. 133), and it had an end (Brunner, *Grundzüge*, p. 52).

[65] See Mircea Eliade's *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (trans. by Rosemary Sheed) (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing, 1963 [originally published in French]), pp. 371-72.

[66] Among the other changes are: (1) the shift in the use of the term Self-Begetter from referring to the highest being (Egyptian) to designating his crystallized reflection; and (2) the substitution (apparently) of the names Love and Faith for earlier designations for the last two female consorts among the Eight. The earlier names would probably have been feminine forms of the male names.

[67] See the views against which Eugnostos is directed (III 70,8-71,1 and par.).

pattern, need to be examined further. It should be noted here, however, that the effect of that identification was the same as that which occurred to the Egyptian historical myths, namely, to transfer them to the supercelestial realm of the timeless.

Does the influence of Egyptian religion in *Eugnostos* translate into the influence of Egyptian religion on Gnosticism? As has been noted, *Eugnostos* is in a sense a transition, or bridge document. Its Gnosticism is an "add on." The crucial question is whether the *Urzeit* description in *Eugnostos* has influenced subsequent gnostic thought. *Eugnostos* was evidently a popular document among the gnostics. The two quite different versions attest to a long period of usage. The fact that it was used as a major component in *The Sophia of Jesus Christ* tells us that it was highly regarded. But do we see other signs of its influence? One indication is the description of the highest being. There are remarkable similarities between the descriptions in *Eugnostos*, and those in *The Apocryphon of John*[68] and *The Tripartite Tractate*[69]: the common elements are numerous and the verbal parallels are often striking.[70] It would be hard to deny a connection among the three. And *Eugnostos* would be a good candidate for having influenced the other two, since the descriptions in them give the impression of considerable rhetorical expansion when compared with *Eugnostos*. (Also, they are to be dated later than *Eugnostos*, since they contain explicitly Christian elements.) But these parallels, significant as they are, do not necessarily prove influence.

The case is strengthened when we observe elements, which clearly fit together in the system of *Eugnostos*, present in subsequent systems in somewhat strained or unexplained relationship to the

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[68] NHC II,*1* 2,25-4,26.

[69] NHC I,*5* 51,1-55,40.

[70] Between and *Eugnostos* and *The Apocryphon of John*: III 71,13-18/11 3,14-15 (ineffable; no one comprehends); III 72,6-11/II 3,26 (superior to all); III 72,21/II 3,10-12; 4,2 (immeasurable); III 72,22-23/II 3,4-6; 4,1 (perfect; no defect); III 73,1/II 4,5 (blessed); III 73,6-8/II 3,1-4 (embraces everything; is embraced by none); III 75,3-5/II 4,22-24 (reflects self in mirror/in pool). Between *Eugnostos* and *The Tripartite Tractate*: III 71,15-18/I 51,25-27 (no deity knew him/no deity for him); III 71,18-19/I 52, 8 (immortal); III 71,22/I 51,28-30; 53,34 (unbegotten; having no beginning); III 72,1-3/I 54,2-11 (no name); III 72,14/I 52,36 (infinite/without beginning, without end); III 72,14/I 53,2 (incomprehensible); III 72 16-18/I 53,40 (good, faultless/blameless [the Coptic word is the same]); III 72,19-21/I 54,40-55,10 (knows self); III 72,23/I 53,40 (perfect); III 75,3-9/I 56,5-16 (reflects self in mirror/conceives self and projects self).

rest. For example, in Irenaeus's account of the Ophites,[71] there are three divine men at the initial stages of cosmic development, just as in *Eugnostos*. But in this system, the first principle is called First Man. His Ennoia (feminine) is called his Son. And these two Men are said somehow to cooperate in begetting a third Man, with the female principle, Holy Spirit. This third one is then called the Son of both the First and Second Men, and is also called Christ (which provides another point of contact with *Eugnostos*, since in it Son of Son of Man is called Savior).[72] The four male *Urgötter* also appear, it seems, but as separated elements below the spirit, in the *Urzeit*. They are recognizable from their original Egyptian names, which appear to have been preserved in Latin equivalents, *aqua*, *tenebrae*, *abyssus* and *chaos*, "water (= Nun), darkness (= Keku), bottomless depth (presumably Tenemu) and boundless empty space (= Heh)."[73] No mention is made of their consorts, and hence the full Egyptian Eight is missing. The four have no function in the supercelestial drama, and the reason for their appearance remains unexplained.[74] It appears that the system in Part A. of *Eugnostos*,

[71] Theodoret identifies the Ophites as Sethians (*Haer. fab.* 1.14).

[72] *Adversus haereses*, 1.30.1.

[73] *Adversus haereses*, 1.30.1 (text from *Irenaeus of Lyons versus Contemporary Gnosticism: A Selection from Books I and II of Adversus Haereses*, ed by J. T. Nielsen [Leiden: Brill, 1977]). The usual interpretation of these terms has been that they refer to Genesis 1:2 (LXX) (e.g., *Gnosticism: A Source Book of Heretical Writings from the Early Christian Period*, ed. by Robert M. Grant [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961], p. 52). However, that verse lacks the fourth element. The information in the Irenaeus passage that seems to connect it with Genesis appears to be an addition, perhaps from a different source from the one used initially: it directly follows the list of elements and reads *super quae ferri spiritum dicunt*, "above which (pl.) they say the spirit is borne," which is close to the Greek of Genesis 1:2 (LXX), but there the spirit is borne above the water only. Tenemu is occasionally replaced by other names, as was noted above. The point of comparison between Tenemu, meaning the disappearing or the lost, and *abyssus* would seem to be the impression an observer has when something is thrown into an *abyssus*. The use of the original names can only be explained by assuming the existence of an account in which they were preserved, perhaps an Egyptian version of Part A of *Eugnostos*. In any case, the names have been used here by those who had a knowledge of their meaning, but no conception of the later function of the Eight. It is conceivable that Irenaeus's report is based on a misunderstanding of the system.

[74] These elements are described as existing in the supercelestial realm. The later reference to "waters" (1.30.3) is a way of speaking about matter (see Werner Foerster, *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts* [trans. ed. by R. McL. Wilson], Vol. I. Patristic Evidence (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972 [from the 1969 German ed.], p. 85 [the introduction to the Irenaeus selection]).

(The writer wishes to make it clear that, although he knows Coptic, he has no knowledge of the Egyptian language of the earlier periods. He has therefore had to depend on translations, in various modern languages, for his access to the Egyptian material referred to in this article.)

or something like it, has influenced the Ophites, but, to say the least, has not been comfortably absorbed.

We have seen that the pattern of the *Urzeit* in *Eugnostos*, Part A, is based on the *Urzeit* beliefs of the ancient Egyptians. And we have now found reason to believe that the pattern of *Eugnostos* influenced subsequent gnostic systems. It appears then that the position of Bousset, Doresse and Bleeker, which has dominated for so long, should be reconsidered; Amélineau seems to have been closer to the mark.

Abstract

Despite the fact that Egypt has provided the most abundant sources for the study of Gnosticism and the occasional mention of Egypt and things Egyptian in those sources, scholars have neglected Egyptian religion as a significant influence in the origin and development of Gnosticism. An examination of the early Nag Hammadi tractate *Eugnostos* makes it possible to see that it was significantly affected by Egyptian religious conceptions of the *Urzeit*. The evidence of the influence of *Eugnostos* upon subsequent gnostic systems suggests that it was at least one route by which Egyptian religion influenced Gnosticism at its core.